

## Profanity <sup>[1]</sup>

## Profanity

by Sean Kenniff, 2006

The existence of profanity in North Carolina, as in other states, can be attributed to the English-speaking settlers who established themselves in the New World. Their newly attained political independence from the mother country greatly affected both their linguistic freedom and their observance of the constricting correctness of British models for language.

Profane language can be divided into seven categories: names of deities, angels, and devils; names connected with the sacred matters of religion; names of saints, holy persons, or biblical characters; names of sacred places; words relating to the future life; vulgar words, or words and phrases unusual or forbidden by polite usage; and expletives, including words or phrases having unusual force for various reasons. Although some of these categories are related to the need to vent emotionally through vocalization, most involve religion.

The federal government provides guidelines regarding the use of profanity. The primary responsibility of the [Federal Communications Commission](#) <sup>[2]</sup> (FCC) is to authorize and regulate interstate communications services, including the Internet. The FCC's 1996 [Communications Decency Act](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, which criminalized profanity by equating it to harassment, affected all computers in homes, libraries, and schools connected to the Internet. In 1997 the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) <sup>[4]</sup> declared the act unconstitutional, observing that the Internet was a unique medium entitled to the highest protection of free speech under the [First Amendment](#) <sup>[5]</sup> to the [U.S. Constitution](#) <sup>[6]</sup>.

In 2001 the [North Carolina State Senate](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, amending a law governing embalmers and funeral directors, passed a bill regulating the for-profit transportation of bodies. This bill prohibits the use of "profanity, indecent, or obscene language in the presence of a dead human body." The Clean Language clause was already law in funeral homes and was extended to the transportation of bodies out of respect for the dead and their loved ones.

### References:

Lars Andersson and Peter Trudgill, *Bad Language* (1990).

Geoffrey Hughes, *Swearing* (1991).

### Additional Resources:

1913 Act relating to the use of profanity on public road and highways: [Public laws and resolutions of the State of North Carolina passed by the General Assembly at its session of...\[1913\]](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources [Digital Collections](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

[State's Anti-Profanity Law Unconstitutional Rules Superior Court Judge](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, 2011

### Subjects:

[21st Century \(2001-present\)](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

[Culture](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

[Great Depression \(1929-1941\)](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

[Law and legal history](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

[N.C. Industrial Revolution \(1900-1929\)](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Post War 20th Century \(1946-2000\)](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

[World War II \(1941-1945\)](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

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[Kenniff, Sean](#) <sup>[18]</sup>

### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) <sup>[19]</sup>

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### Links

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.ncpedia.org/profanity> <sup>[2]</sup> <http://www.fcc.gov/> <sup>[3]</sup> <http://transition.fcc.gov/telecom.html/> <sup>[4]</sup> <http://www.supremecourt.gov/> <sup>[5]</sup> [http://www.law.cornell.edu/drupal/cache/normal/www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first\\_amendment\\_orig\\_tab\\_questions.html?utm\\_expid=9019691-0&utm\\_referrer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.law.cornell.edu%2Fconstitution%2Fbillofrights](http://www.law.cornell.edu/drupal/cache/normal/www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment_orig_tab_questions.html?utm_expid=9019691-0&utm_referrer=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.law.cornell.edu%2Fconstitution%2Fbillofrights) <sup>[6]</sup> <http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/> <sup>[7]</sup> <https://www.ncleg.net/senate/senate.html> <sup>[8]</sup> <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/public-laws-and-resolutions-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-at-its-session-of-...1913/1956418?item=2101176> <sup>[9]</sup> <http://www.digital.ncdcr.gov> <sup>[10]</sup> <http://www.aclu.org/free-speech/state-s-anti-profanity-law-unconstitutional-rules-superior-court-judge> <sup>[11]</sup> <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/21st-century-2001> <sup>[12]</sup>

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